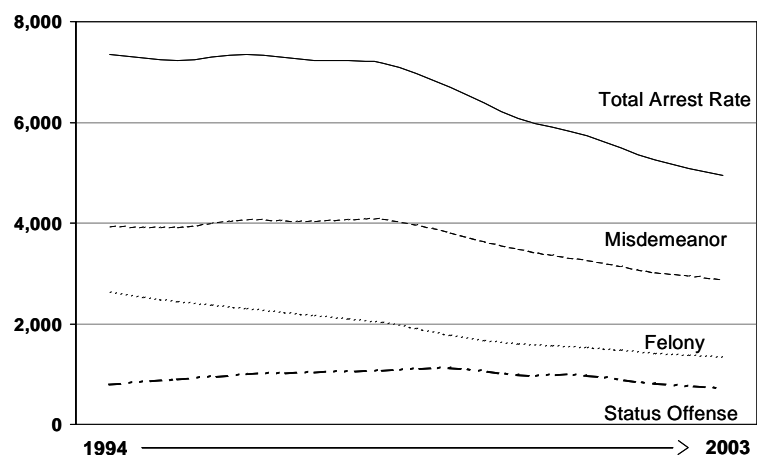


California Juvenile Delinquency Data

This update summarizes recent data and trends regarding children in the juvenile delinquency system. The last version of this update was published in December 2003.

Arrests

In 2003, there were 223,320 juvenile arrests, or 4,941 per 100,000 Californians ages 10 to 17. That rate marks a 33% decline in juvenile arrests over the decade (from 7,346 arrests per 100,000 in 1994), taking into account the population increase in youth aged 10 to 17 years old in California over the decade (see chart at right). The felony arrest rate fell consistently throughout the decade, for a 10-year decline of 49% (from 2,621 to 1,347). The misdemeanor offense rate decline began in 1999 but was quite steep, accounting for a 27% decline in the arrest rate in that category over the decade (from 3,929 to 2,881).



The population-adjusted rates suggest that delinquency in California has declined, but they do not speak to the workload of the public institutions that respond to delinquency. The absolute decline in arrests over the decade has been only 13%.

Of total arrest charges in 2003, 27% were felonies, 58% were misdemeanors, and the remaining 15% were status offenses.¹ The 2003 distribution is markedly different from that of 1994, when 36% of the most severe arrest charges were felonies.

Female youth were 25% of the juvenile arrestee population in 2003. The age at arrest was 12 or younger for 6% of all juvenile arrests. Hispanic youth were 44% of the 2003 juvenile arrestees, white youth were 31%, black youth were 18%, and other racial and ethnic groups together were 7%.

Court Cases

In 2003, there were 88,593 filings, of which 58,709 were original delinquency filings, 28,884 were subsequent delinquency filings, 1,629 were original status-offense filings, and 55 were subsequent status-offense filings. (Subsequent filings alter or enhance the original charge and are not always reflective of a separate alleged offense, although they will be disposed of separately from the original filing. Original

¹ When there are multiple charges per arrest, the arrestee is characterized by the most severe arrest charge.

filings are more representative of alleged offenses.) The 2003 total original filings of 60,101 represent a 4% drop in caseload since 1994. The proportional mix of delinquency and status-offense cases remained fairly constant. About 1–4% of the juvenile filings are for status-offense cases each year, although they compose about 14% of juvenile arrests.

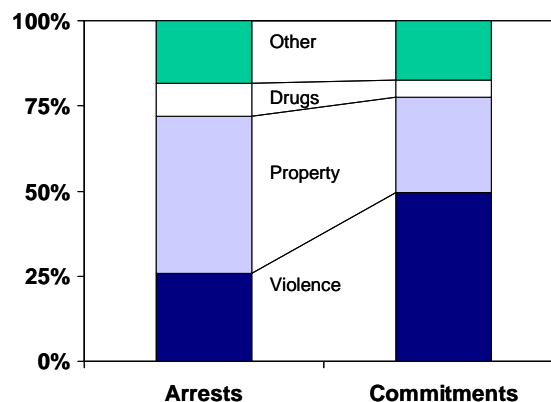
About 1 in 4 juvenile arrests are brought to juvenile court. The relationship between arrest and original filings has remained unchanged over the past 10 years. Likewise, throughout the decade, an average of 86 juvenile cases were disposed of for every 100 original filings in any given year.² The year-to-year deviation from that average has been slight.

Detention

In 2003, 1,229 youth were committed to the California Youth Authority (CYA). A very large majority of these commitments were ordered by the juvenile court (95%); the rest of the youth were ordered by criminal court to serve some or all of their detention time at the CYA. Last year, the juvenile court committed 35.9 per 100,000 California youth to the CYA. The rate of commitment has fallen by about two-thirds since a 1995 high of 107.1 commitments per 100,000 juveniles.

Females were 6% of the population committed in 2003, which, while small, represents a 72% increase since 1994. The racial and ethnic composition of the 2003 commitments was 15% white, 50% Hispanic, 30% black, 3% Asian, and 2% other. The average age at admission was 17.2 years in 2003; that number has remained constant over the decade.

Some offense types are more likely to lead to CYA commitment than other types. Youth charged with violent crimes are more likely to be committed than youth found on property, drugs, or other charges (see chart at right). Violent charges were 26% of juvenile felony arrest charges and 52% of primary commitment charges in 2003. Property offenses were 44% of felony arrest charges and 27% of commitment charges; and drugs were 10% of felony arrest charges and 5% of primary commitment charges.



Probation

In 2002, the state's juvenile probation caseload was 81,872, of which 80% were formal probation cases, 15% were informal probation cases, and 4% were non-ward probation cases. These proportions have remained constant over the past decade. In addition to these cases, the probation department also oversees cases given a deferred entry of judgment and diversion cases, of which there were 3,922 and 16,185, respectively, in 2002. Of all cases overseen by the department, females make up 22% of the population. Among youth on formal probation, 7,740 were in foster care.

The number of probation cases in 2002 fell 16% from 97,187 in 1996 (the earliest year for which comparable figures are available). Once adjusted for population growth, however, probation figures fell by 28%: out of 100,000 youth 10–17 years old, 1,871 were on probation in 2002 and 2,607 were on probation in 1996.

² Cases may be disposed of in the year they are filed or in subsequent years.

A 2002 survey of chief probation officers in California showed that 42 of 52 responding counties offered a total of 170 probation services that they considered compatible with balanced and restorative justice principles (see chart at right). Community service, mediation, restitution, and peer court are restorative justice innovations that have been the most widely adopted.

Restorative Juvenile Probation Services	
26	Community Service
24	Mediation or Conferencing
21	Restitution Collection
16	Peer Court
13	Boards
13	Community Law Enforcement
13	Deferred Entry of Judgment
13	Victim Expression
7	Mentoring
6	Community Conferencing
18	Other
170	Total

Juveniles in Adult Court

Juveniles may be referred to the adult criminal justice system in two ways: either they are transferred from the juvenile court or the District Attorney files the case directly in the adult criminal court. Direct filings are required for specific felony offenses, whereas transfers from juvenile court (via a failed “fitness hearing”) are made for a variety of both felony and misdemeanor crimes. There were a total of 814 transfers to the adult system in 2003, of which 608 dispositions have been recorded; the remaining 206 are to be disposed of in a subsequent year. Over two-thirds of the 608 cases resulted in a conviction. Only two-fifths of 1 percent of all juvenile arrests were transferred to adult court in 2003.

In 2003, district attorneys referred a total of 410 juveniles directly to adult court, of whom 44 (11%) were female and 276 (67%) were 15–17 years old³ at the time of referral. The racial and ethnic composition of the 2003 direct files was 20% white, 52% Hispanic, 19% black, 8% Asian, and 1% other.

Fitness hearings were ordered for 586 juveniles in 2003. Over two-thirds (404) were found unfit for the juvenile court process and were transferred to the adult court system. Of the 43 females who underwent a hearing, fewer than half (19 out of 43) were found unfit and transferred to the adult court system, compared to 71% of males (385 out of 543). Seventy-one percent of the juveniles found unfit to remain in juvenile court were also aged 15–17. The racial and ethnic composition of the 404 juveniles who failed a fitness hearing and were remanded to adult court in 2003 was 9% white, 47% Hispanic, 35% black, 6% Asian, and 3% other.

Crime Incidence in Public Schools

About 6 million children were enrolled in public elementary, middle school, and high schools in California in 2000. According to the California Department of Education, those schools experienced about 94,000 crime incidents in that year. About 85% of those crimes were almost equally divided among battery, property crime, and drug or alcohol offenses. The remainder were possession of a deadly weapon (8%), assault with a deadly weapon (2%), sex offenses (2%), and other crimes (3%). There were also two homicides.

³ If someone under age 18 is suspected of committing a crime but is arrested after turning age 18, he or she will still be prosecuted under the purview of the juvenile court system.

About the *California Juvenile Statistical Abstract*

The *California Juvenile Statistical Abstract*, a project of the AOC's Center for Families, Children & the Courts, is a compilation of reliable, representative statistical data about children and families involved in the courts and with related institutions. It is available on the Internet in PDF format.

This *Research Update* is one of a series that summarize data from the Abstract.

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The CFCC generates and distributes research-based information that has promise for informing the work of family court services in California and nationwide. To learn more about its work and to see more *Research Updates*, visit www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/.

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